DOWNING PLACE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE

PLACE MATTERS



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Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Elders and Members of Downing Place United Reformed Church

Unless otherwise indicated photos are taken by Jess Uden



LETTER FROM A MEMBER - CHRIS WRIGHT

Editor: with Downing Place URC 'in vacancy', I am grateful to those church members, lay and ordained, who agreed to my request that they write something for readers in Place Matters, much as our Minister had until his retirement last year. This month it's Chris.

Mary and I very much appreciate reading the letters from members in *Place Matters* whilst we are in vacancy. Each one is a treasure. I hope that our esteemed Editor continues the practice when this space becomes the preserve of our new Minister again.

What is in your 'In-tray/box'? That is apart from the home admin and keeping up with family and friends. For those in education or employment, the answer might be relatively easy, though for some it might be 'the unexpected'. But many of us in the Downing Place URC congregation no longer have the routine of daily work. I know that many, especially the 'young' retired, have regular commitments and together these form a huge contribution, whether to this Church, the wider Church, voluntary associations, younger family members or neighbours. So many aspects of life would suffer or disappear without your time and interest.

For those privileged to move into a later stage of retirement, participation might become more sedentary, but just as valuable. In her insightful letter for September's *Place Matters*, Elizabeth Whitehorn asked us whether we had 'talked to God about it?' Her question is a challenge to all of us, of every age, but talking to God is a ministry that those of us in later life might feel particularly called to as we are no longer so able to rush about and 'do' things for God (though a woman a year older than me, recently cycled up the three toughest mountain climbs of the Tour de France in support of Amos Trust's appeal for Gaza). 'Doing for God' and 'Talking to God' are two sides of the same coin, to paraphrase part of chapter 2 of the Letter of James, but in later life the balance might shift more towards the 'talking'.

So my question might become, 'What are you talking to God about?' What particular things is God putting into your in-tray/box, in addition to the 'regulars'? Perhaps it is in danger of becoming overloaded, indicating that we need to archive or bin some things so we can concentrate on ones that God is pressing upon us, realising that God entrusts those things to others. Let me tell you of two matters, as in addition to

our churches and Village community, that I feel God is laying upon me at the moment.

The first has been there far too long but its priority is higher than ever. It is prayer and action for the 'Holy Land'. I don't need to detail the seemingly intractable situation between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people, confined and deprived in the West Bank and Gaza. What is terrifying are the words of hatred and violence from many, particularly young, Israelis as they approach their election. I am afraid we would hear similar words from some Palestinians, were reporters allowed into Gaza. Our prayer surely must be that God will work in the hearts of people on both sides to lead them to realise that there can be no peace until each understands the other as people created in God's image just as they are, and that Palestinians have a right to justice and to their land. I thank God for any green shoot of olive branch, such as Israeli activists standing alongside their harvesting Palestinian cousins even while settlers battle to destroy the vital Olive Harvest in the West Bank. To quote Arundati Roy's well-known encourager,

> "Another day is not only possible, she is on her way.
> On a quiet day I can hear her breathing."

The second, quite different, item pressing for my attention and prayer that it might be celebrated by the whole congregation, is that in July next year we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Council for World Mission. This brought together the three streams of overseas mission, the Congregational Council for World Mission, formerly London Missionary Society, the Presbyterian Church of England Overseas Mission and, later, the mission work of the Churches of Christ. It also established a totally new model for World Mission as a partnership between equal Churches. We were on leave from South Africa in 1977, so I could attend the Inaugural Service in Methodist Central Hall. Looking ahead to next year, a small group under the World Church & Public Issues Group will soon be working on plans for Downing Place to celebrate CWM's 50th Birthday over 17th and 18th July, looking back but also to the future to which God calls the worldwide Church. Please note the date and if you have any relevant artefacts or books, let me know.

ROBERT POPE - A PROFILE

As the 1960s approached their end, I was born in Swansea at the mis-named Mount Pleasant Hospital. It had previously been the (then) town's workhouse. I am a twin, my brother (born just before me) is a URC minister in Somerset. We have an older sister who still lives in Swansea. We enjoyed a happy and stable family life. The very restricted time of my youth which I mis-spent was passed at a local snooker hall (the game was very popular when I was a teenager). I became fairly proficient at it, but deteriorating eyesight and university brought that pastime to an end.

I remember as a young child my mother telling us we would be going to 'the new church'. What had been, since 1906, a Congregational church had recently joined the United Reformed Church (in 1973 – the debate about joining was long and arduous; in all there were four rounds of voting!). When I saw the building, I remember thinking that, if it was new, why did it look so old?



Manselton United Reformed Church

This first encounter with church was to attend 'Band of Hope' on a Tuesday evening. My recollection is that there was a good number of children and a smaller number of (what appeared to be) elderly women in attendance. We sang what were then incomprehensible choruses, many of which I still do not understand, and heard talks about the 'demon drink'. We also recited the pledge. But bank holiday trips to the seaside at Llanstephan and the country park at Aberdare provide happy memories. I soon after began to attend Sunday School, initially held in the afternoon but later during the morning service.

I cannot thank that congregation enough. They were accepting, loving and nurturing. It was there that I realized that there was something challenging, but also exciting and reassuring about Christian faith, an alternative vision of what life and society should look like, and there that I realized that the church was a place to which I

could commit my life. None of us were baptized as infants and my parents were not at that time church-goers. It was special to me to be baptized, aged 18, in a river with my brother, sister and a friend in the youth group. The date was that of my great-grandmother's birthday. She had wanted to be a missionary but failed whatever test there was in those days. Among my treasured possessions, I have two books she owned. In both she has written, in pencil, 'Hannah Mary Williams, saved by grace'. I find it both touching and poignant.

Perhaps it was a strange decision to be baptized and enter in to church membership just as I left for University. I had intended pursuing a degree in Welsh and went north to Bangor. At the end of my first year, I changed my mind and switched to single honours Religious Studies (which, in fact, was a Theology degree). After three years, I stayed on to pursue doctoral research. A year or so applying unsuccessfully for academic jobs saw a change of direction and, having been encouraged by others, I candidated for ministry. Following assessment, I entered Westminster College. The opportunity came to return to Bangor to teach in my old department. I took it but continued my ministerial training. I began my teaching career in 1997 and was ordained in 2001. For nine years I had pastoral responsibility for a Methodist/URC congregation in Penmaenmawr.



Robert with his brother and sister on the day of his ordination in July 2001

I feel particularly blessed to have been able to pursue academic interests, to teach and research, alongside working in the church. My earliest years in the university were the most productive and the most stable. My work in the local church kept me grounded and it was a privilege to walk alongside the congregation as they worked out their discipleship, celebrating life's joys and achievements while also facing challenges, sometimes weeping and grieving together.

In all I spent thirteen years at Bangor. For various complex reasons, I then moved to Lampeter and spent seven years there, though I lived in Carmarthen. Despite the

opportunities that continued to present themselves, University life became increasingly difficult, in some ways erratic and certainly insecure. When the opportunity came, in 2017, to move to Westminster College I was both ready, and pleased, to make the move. While it has not always been easy, the opportunity to accompany ordinands through initial formation to ordination has been hugely rewarding and invigorating.

Although I have not been in pastoral charge since 2010, I have continued to serve the URC through leading worship in various churches on a Sunday and by appointment to several committees. I served on the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee, the Education and Learning Committee, the EM2/EM3 Sub-committee, and the Faith and Order Committee. Since 2020 I have convened what is now called the Worship, Faith and Order Committee, while I have also edited the URC History Society's Journal since 2012.

My arrival in Cambridge was around the time that St Columba's and Emmanuel churches were looking to unite. It was natural that I should attend on Sundays when not leading worship elsewhere and in any case I already knew a number of other members of the two churches. My appointment to Westminster College was a timed one and I delayed transferring membership until my post was renewed. I value that worship is ordered at Downing Place but never restricted, the music of course, and the friendliness of the members. I have not yet found enough space for greater involvement in the life of the church, which I regret. My prayer is that it will not be too long before there is a new minister in place. It will take some time to establish a working pattern for the 'mission partnership', but having a minister with a clear vision for the churches and their mission will help.

It is difficult to believe that I am entering my tenth year at Westminster, and more difficult to believe that the URC has decided no longer to use the College for ministerial training. For all sorts of reasons the future seems uncertain and precarious, but not for the first time. The past offers much to be thankful for and the community of faith offers comfort and support. When I am not working, I like to read (travel books and history), listening to music, visiting the Scottish islands, and returning as much as possible to Wales.

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SERMONS

I joined in the 'relaxed' house groups, enabled by Zoe Bennett and Deborah McVey, in July-August this year – see the July-August 2026 *Place Matters* – with the theme Encouragement and Nourishment: People, Places and Things.

They went really well. At each meeting, participants were free to speak, or just to listen. At the last one, we were invited to share something that "nourishes us in our faith journey". Several things came to my mind – not least, music. But in the end, I spoke about Downing Place sermons! Why was that?

Partly because I almost always find them helpful – and interesting – but also … During the Covid 19 'lockdowns' in 2020 I was obliged to stay at home at all times, and strictly to avoid face-to-face contact. Before long, I realised that I really needed to find something to do! Probably in the avoidance of decorating a bedroom or mowing the lawn, I emailed Ann Auger, to ask if there was any way that I could 'help' at Downing Place URC – something that I could accomplish from the keyboard and screen on my desk at home. Ann suggested that I could help with routine tasks such as entering regular events on the DP ChurchSuite calendar and, later, that perhaps I could learn how to upload the Sunday sermons to the church website. Of course, Ann needed to show me how to do such things, but I was not permitted to be in the same room with her while she showed me on her screen! And so the Zoom app came the rescue, as it did – and continues – to enable the meetings of some DP Groups. Towards the end of 2020, and into 2021, Ann undertook her online Zoom 'coaching', while the New Boy – some miles away from his Tutor - watched, asked questions, and took notes. Suffice to say that I'm still uploading the Sunday sermons for the world to see.

Sermons - Downing Place URC

I revisit them all before I upload them to the DP website. Sometimes to recall something that I found particularly interesting or helpful; sometimes to see what I missed when I lost concentration for a few minutes … This inspired (?) me to want to write an article – this one - for Place Matters about DP sermons, and to remind folk about the DP website page.

It occurred to me that it would be good to include another article from a

'professional' on how they go about writing a sermon, and any general guidelines. I thought that I'd like to ask David Cornick first, and I was pleased when he replied to say that he would have "a shot" at it. His contribution follows this one.

I was privileged to read and upload Nigel Uden's sermons for just over four years: that must be close to 200 sermons. A quarter of a million words, two or three books. Even before, and especially after Nigel's retirement, we were blessed to be led in worship by many others, lay and ordained, individuals and groups, from within and beyond our church membership. It is invidious, albeit inevitable, that I refer to just a few of the sermons given at Downing Place over the last five years. There are many aspects of sermon content and delivery that have come to my attention but I address just a few of them here.

As I read Nigel's sermon texts week by week, I became very aware and appreciative of the quality of his *writing* – choice of language, sentence and paragraph construction. The following comes, almost at random, from an Advent sermon in November 2024 (with apologies, here and elsewhere, for the ellipsis …). Nigel begins with a comment about the importance of editorial work in general, and in the Bible in particular.

> The Bible's authors often write in teams; editors ensure a coherence to their combined efforts … Today's two passages from the Old Testament are a case in point, and suggest a skilful editorial hand. It seems they want readers to understand something about how society is best ordered for the good of the people and the glory of God. What we heard from the first Chapter of I Samuel introduces us to the birth of Hannah's child, but it is the beginning of the account of how monarchy comes to Israel. In Israel's history, Samuel is a key player, variously a seer, a priest, a judge, a prophet, and military leader. But supremely, he's a king maker. … By the time we reach the end of II Samuel – probably a separate volume solely because of the size of the scrolls upon which original texts were written – we are left wondering whether monarchy is a real blessing for Israel; yes or no. Philip Satterthwaite suggests that the answer to that is, 'yes, it is good when the monarch is someone like the obedient David and no, if they are like David when he abuses power'. [1] … As Robert Alter has it: 'The story of David is probably the greatest single narrative representation in antiquity of a human life evolving by slow stages through time, … It also

provides the most unflinching insight into the cruel processes of history and into human behaviour warped by the pursuit of power.' [2]

You might have noticed the superscripts [1], [2] in that passage. They refer to footnotes, citing Philip Satterthwaite and Robert Alter. Of course, one could not 'hear' those footnotes in the spoken sermon, but you'll find them in most of Nigel's sermons on our website. When I mentioned them to Nigel in an email in July 2022, he replied "… In truth, it is all to do with me being confident that if someone challenges me on the point I am making, I know how to give accurate account of myself!"

Then there are the opening sentences of sermons. These can usefully attract the attention of the person in the pew, and give a familiar analogy or context to what is to come. Here's David Cornick, mid-November last year:

> And Jesus walked along King's Parade, and they said to him, 'Isn't that just the most exquisite piece of architecture you've ever seen? Look at the buttresses, the pinnacles, the expanse and colour of the glass. Such exquisite craftsmanship, and all to the glory of God. And Jesus looked up at King's College Chapel, and said, '…the days will come when not one stone will be left on another; all will be thrown down.' (Luke 21:6). There are times when I think the Preachers' Union ought to protest at some of the texts we have to deal with!

David again, May 2021:

> Last words have their own grim charm. There is the dignity of Marie Antionette's 'Pardonnez moi Monsieur' to her executioner, the reputed drollery of Voltaire who when asked by a priest if he wished to renounce Satan replied 'Now is not the time for making new enemies', and the misplaced optimism of the Union Army General John Sedgewick, 'They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist …' as he was shot in mid-sentence.
>
> '… I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last …' (Jn 15:16)
>
> Not quite Jesus' last words, but almost, for in John they are part of the so-called farewell discourse which takes place on the eve of his betrayal.

Then sometimes the preacher tackles, head on and with little notice, some tragedy or

controversy currently in the news headlines, trying to make some Christian sense of it, and how the Christian church might contribute to the ongoing public conversation. One Sunday morning in October 2025, David Thompson began his sermon (on Habakkuk 2:4 'The righteous live by their faith') with these words:

> Members of the congregation will appreciate that I found it necessary to abandon what I had previously written on Thursday in the light of the events in Manchester that morning, which I discovered at the point I had completed what I had first written … For two people to be murdered on their way to worship God on a Holy Day, for them the holiest day of the Jewish year is horrifying, not least because it brings the horrors that some people in other parts of the world experience daily into the reality of our normally peaceful domestic lives in an inescapable way. Cambridge is a long way from Manchester, particularly by train, but we have our own extremists too. There were times in eighteenth-century Cambridge when Dissenting Meeting Houses … were mobbed or attacked, usually by university students.

An extract from that sermon was included, with David's permission, in the next month's *Place Matters*, followed by an article by David Tatem about Interfaith Connection Cambridge, which meets three times a year in the place of worship of a different faith group each time, giving insight into the life and beliefs of the faiths represented.

Let me conclude with the most obvious omission so far. Each sermon addresses one or more of the scripture readings that we will have heard before it begins. The list of sermons on our website includes, for each of them, the date, the preacher, and the scripture readings in that service. One of the chief purposes of a sermon must be to 'explain' scripture. To set it in its original context, and to explore its relevance today, in our world. Here's Janet Bottoms speaking about Matthew 14: 22 -33, with the disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is not with them, a fierce headwind blew up, and they were being battered by the waves. Jesus went out to them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

Janet comments:

> He immediately tells them not to be afraid. "It is I", he says. Peter answers,

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus simply replies "Come", and Peter gets out of the boat and starts towards him.

What is in Peter's mind, we must surely ask - and it is worth noting that this part of the story appears only in Matthew's gospel, a gospel which tends to focus on Peter and his leadership. "If it is you", he says, that is, not an apparition, not your ghost. Is he testing it/him? Or is he thinking of himself – "Let me do it, too. I'll show you. If you can, I can."

Is this what is means to "believe in the heart". Total confidence? Self-confidence? If so, it is quickly gone. Peter loses his nerve as soon as he sees, as soon as he feels the reality of his situation: his unprotected self – alone - in the middle of the waves; that moment of helpless terror so graphically voiced in psalm 42: "all your waves and your billows have gone over me". Beginning to sink he cries out, "Lord, save me!" and immediately Jesus reaches a hand to him saying "*You little-faith, why did you doubt?"* Then they are both in the boat, together - and this time the disciples worship Jesus, saying "Truly you are the Son of God", the one who saves.

Does it take a moment like this for them to realise? Do they forget it again in the day-to- day business of ordinary life - or even doubt the experience? It is so easy to forget – so easy not to learn from such moments or experiences.

Janet's sermon then looks ahead to Peter's three-times denial that he even knew the captive Jesus. And how the old Peter is transformed when he meets the risen Christ: no longer a "little-faith", though still recognizably Peter, the leader, the one who proclaims on the day of Pentecost that "this man whom you crucified . . . God raised up".

I'll leave it there (for now!). There is so much to give thanks for in our common life at Downing Place. Not least, in our gathering to worship together, for those who prepare and lead our worship. And for those amazing sermons.

Tim Rowland

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PREPARING FOR PREACHING

David Cornick writes:

I fear this will read like a dull recipe, compared to Tim's delighted 'restaurant review' of Downing Place's sermon store. A meal out is, after all, a much more enticing experience than peeling spuds in the kitchen!

But peeling spuds is where it begins. So, how do I go about preparing a sermon as part of an act of worship? If all is going well, sometime between a month and two weeks before the service, I'll check the Lectionary. That can be a painful reminder that lectionary compilers are only human. Sometimes the theme linking the readings is obvious, but at others it's as mysterious as a cryptic crossword. But I'll prayerfully and reflectively read the lections.

The next stage is to reach for commentaries and studies, on the shelf and increasingly online, to discover what those far more learned in Scripture and theology than I am think is happening in the texts. That is a time consuming process and results in pages of notes. To return to my kitchen analogy, I then let that stock deepen and take on flavour overnight.

Next day I return to my wordy stock, and have a sniff and a taste. And then creativity takes over, and the writing process begins. All writers will know the mix of feelings, frustrations and excitements as the blank page ripples to life. I remain convinced the Holy Spirit is the essential participant in this for the sermon writer, there at the periphery of my spiritual vision as I thrash around trying to find the telling sentences which will open these Scriptures up to feed the hunger of those who listen. I've been preaching now for more than half a century, and it gets no easier – indeed in some ways as you get older it gets harder – but any sermon which takes less than eight hours is a rare gift.

Once the sermon is written, the remainder of the service can be attended to, its movement and music fine-tuned to the theme of the sermon as prayers, shared worship and all important hymns are chosen. The result will hopefully be a seamless whole which will move the congregation effortlessly and smoothly from the call to worship to the Benediction.

If that's the recipe, what do I think I'm doing when I preach? Well, I am not

teaching! All the teachers in the congregation know full well that a fifteen minute monologue is the worst tool in an educational kit-bag! And (despite my penchant for a bit of humour) I'm not doing stand-up either.

I am a minister in the Reformed tradition, and central to Reformed theology is the understanding that God is encountered through the history of the people of Israel and the person and mission of Jesus Christ as born witness to in Scripture. The reformations of the sixteenth century sought to restore the balance between that reality and the sacraments. For the Reformed, the focus on God's presence became the Word of God, as recorded in the human words of Scripture, and a whole spirituality of the ear and listening replaced the intensely visual culture of the middle ages. That, of course, became unbalanced, and over the last century or so we've learnt again the value of the visual and the beautiful. But the truth remains that God comes to us in words, the Word made flesh. That means that words have a sacramental potency for they can mediate God. We believe that in a mysterious, wonderful way, God comes to us through the reading of Scripture and its exposition. And God does that through our minds, our imaginations, our dreaming and the random connections that we make. So, when I preach, I believe that I am taking part in a sacramental activity, that through my words, God will wonderfully and extraordinarily speak a word to a soul in need. Occasionally, and how blessed are those moments, an email later in the week will bear witness to that (yes, it has happened at Downing Place!). Rather differently, most preachers will recognise the experience of being thanked for something they've not said! All that means is that somewhere between my words and your needs the Spirit has been at work - and that is why we have a prayer for illumination at the start of each sermon – 'Lord, take my words, and use them to speak Your Word, for I ask it the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.' Praise be to God, it happens.



INSIGHTS INTO OUR RECENT JUNIOR CHURCH SESSIONS

Sunday 11 October was an autumnal day, and our Junior Church families were enjoying God's wonderful world in different ways. Some were away camping with cousins, others were welcoming people into their homes for a meal, while a few of us headed into the church garden to check on the nasturtium seeds we had planted. Some were growing nicely, just as in our Bible story!





Tim had told us the story of Moses and the golden calf (Exodus 32), and Penny helped us think more about God and Jesus. There was also plenty of golden play dough to enjoy! At our table, we retold the story of Moses – there was quite a lot to remember – before thinking about how the Israelites were learning to pray and talk with God. We remembered our Harvest thanksgiving prayers, when we had used an empty plate to help us think about people we wanted to pray for. As it was Prisons Week, we also used a prayer written by a 16-year-old boy with experience of people being in prison. We then explored how we could use our five senses to help us offer our own prayers of thanksgiving each day. We decorated plates as we talked about the different ways we can pray.

The following weekend we welcomed David Tatem to Junior Church. David has joined our team rota, working with our secondary school-aged children, and we are very pleased to have him on board. Our gathering activity involved looking at photographs showing how people with different eye conditions might see the world. The children noticed blurring, missing parts and unusual colours. They recognised what was in the pictures but only had a partial view. We talked about how glasses or medication can improve our vision. This led us into the final part of the story of Moses, when God revealed himself to Moses but did not allow him to see his face. We sang *How Far Away is Heaven?*, the song the children wrote with Jane Bower, before splitting into groups to think about how we can become more aware of God's presence, even when we cannot see him. Ideas included praying, looking at nature and enjoying time with friends and family.



On Sunday 25 October John reminded us of how much God loves us, and how we are called to love our neighbours as we would like to be loved. We continued exploring this idea in our groups, using a map to think about our neighbours, both nearby and far away, and how we can care for them and show them God's love. We drew faces on Post-it notes to represent the people we had been thinking about. One member of the group found another use for the round shapes, turning them into a snowman! On one side he looked angry, but after he 'met Jesus', we turned him over to discover the words: 'Let's be friends'. We finished by praying for our neighbours around the world, remembering that loving our neighbours reaches far beyond the people who live closest to us.





Elza de Bruin, Lorraine Thornton and Jess Uden, with thanks to all the leaders and helpers for their contributions to the work of Junior Church.

THE OFFICE AT DOWNING PLACE URC

The office is extremely busy and the team have a lot to complete within the working week. There are constant pressures coming from many directions which mean that Jess and the team have to prioritise tasks, in order to manage everything that is vital for that week. Sometimes it's not possible to complete all requests as the Office and we would wish and we ask for your understanding in these circumstances. Please be confident that the team will work on everything in order of priority.

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REFLECTIONS ON ELDERSHIP

Alan Rickard:

On the 16th of November 1997 I was ordained an elder in St Columba's Church, my certificate of ordination being signed by the minister Rev'd Keith Riglin and Hazel Morrison, Church Secretary.

It has been a privilege and overwhelmingly a pleasure to have served as an elder over these years, firstly with Keith Riglin and then with Nigel Uden. We have celebrated 125 years of St Columba's in 2016 and seen the two churches of Emmanuel and St Columba's working with increasing collaboration over the years until our coming together in 2018 and the subsequent full engagement of our refurbished premises post-pandemic.

When I became an elder, the policemen were already looking young. As I grew into the rôle I observed I was older than the then prime minister and now I'm older than the current Pope! In retirement my Downing Place activities, along with my lifetime passion for choral singing, have helped keep 'retirement paralysis' at bay. So it's time, and rightly so, at the end of my current term of office to stand aside from being an elder for many of those intervening years and encourage others to consider their

calling. As I write this, as a member of the Stewardship Group, we are currently writing to the membership to consider eldership nominations to be made early in the New Year. Might you be one of our new elders?

This is a particularly important time in the life of our church to serve on the eldership. While we seek to call a minister to our new mission partnership of Downing Place, St Luke's LEP, Fulbourn, and Stetchworth and Cheveley, the Elders Meeting will help lead this search, and discern with the Church Meeting whom we should call. Working with the new minister once in place will be crucial both in terms of their joint ministry of minister and elders and for the future mission of this part of the URC in the Eastern Province.

As I preached in a recent Sunday sermon, from Matthew 20: verses 1 to 16, Jesus tells the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. At the end of the day, the landowner pays the hired labourers all the same wage, one denarius, whether they started first thing in the morning, working for twelve hours through the heat of the day, or only commenced work at five o'clock in the afternoon. The workers who worked the longest grumble about receiving the same wage as those who worked for just an hour. The landowner says to one of them, 'Friend I am doing you no wrong'. And 'Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' The message in verse 16, when Jesus states that 'the last will be first, and the first last', is that no matter how long or how hard a believer works during their lifetime, the reward of eternal life will be the same given to all -an eternity in heaven in the presence of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Members and friends, might this be the time for you to consider how you might use your time and talents to serve in the vineyard and reap your reward in heaven?



Image by StillVision Photography

THE CHERRY HINTON ROAD TUESDAY FELLOWSHIP

Since the last report in *Place Matters* in March 2026, the CHR Tuesday Fellowship has continued to meet weekly, apart from in August where we had two garden parties held in the gardens of Penny and Pamela. Most of the meetings have been held at St Athanasios Hall. There was the occasion in May when we could not access the hall because of exams taking place. There was another occasion when we went to the Orchard in Grantchester in May. It was during the very hot weather, and those of us who were able to go to Grantchester were grateful for a brief respite from the heat as we sat under the trees.





We have had some inspiring talks during this time. Paul Nevitt spoke about how there are different meanings arising from the translations of the bible in Greek and Hebrew. On July 7th, we had a most interesting talk from Gerald Norden about the work of the British Legion, it's history, and how today the British Legion helps people who are veterans of wars. We were delighted to hear that Nigel Uden, as a former chaplain to the Fulbourn and Teversham branch, was awarded a gold badge for his service: which is the highest RBL award given. In July Richard Lewney came to give us a talk on the bible story of Ruth.

The "Word Together " has continued every month. Wendy has introduced each discussion. In March we looked at the Passion and the last supper, appropriately just before Easter, and in the following months we discussed the Resurrection, and then the Ascension, and the bible story of Jesus calming the waves. In September we looked at Jesus' visit to the temple. All of these sessions involved a lot of preparation and we are so grateful to Wendy who facilitated these sessions.

We have continued to have some enjoyable Members Own Sessions. We have had a

craft session when members painted from pictures and from a still life of flowers. We had a quiz facilitated by Carole Scullion when a speaker could not make it. Tom has talked about sleeping all night in aid of the British Legion. He was able to raise over two hundred pounds. We have brought in photos of our younger selves, and have asked members to connect the photo with the member. In September the theme was on what we did on our holiday. As usual it was so good to hear about Wendy and Tom's experiences at Holiday Forum. In May we were delighted again by the spring dances of the Capriole Dancers.

Most importantly we have been blessed by two wonderful services led by Elizabeth Caswell. In March we had a Pentecostal Service and were so pleased to receive the bread and the wine while sitting round a table. which meant we served and received ourselves. In September we had our Harvest Festival. The money which we raised in two collections came to £24. This time we took the money and the food which we collected to the Food Hub in Wulfstan Way, for which they were very grateful.

The donations which we have given in this period have been to the Christian Blind Mission, the British Legion, the children in Ukraine and Gaza and the Food Hub.

Finally we were saddened to hear of Don Boud's death in June, He had been a very active member of the Fellowship in the past and will be remembered by everyone who attended Cherry Hinton Road URC with great affection. However we continue to keep in touch with those members who are unable to attend because of mobility and health issues. Margaret King and Margaret Vidall are in care homes, and Barbara Boud, Sheila and Don Ostler are housebound. We pray for them in our meetings as well as visiting and giving them our monthly newsletter.

We continue to be so grateful that despite the conflicts both in Ukraine and the Middle East we can meet together in safety and security. We pray that peace will prevail in all areas of conflict in the world.



Penny Milsom

CHRISTIAN AID

CAROL SINGING IN THE MARKET SQUARE

New this year:
The Cambridge Christian Aid Supporters Group have received permission from the City Council to sing carols outside the Guildhall. We need your support!

Saturday 5th December From 10.15am

On the Market Square - Outside the Guildhall
Please come along to enjoy singing the carols and help Christian Aid.
Bring warm clothing, rainproofing (but pray for much needed rain to hold off for an hour or two!), and water to keep the vocal cords irrigated. Carol words will be provided. If you can play an instrument, please bring it along, and encourage others to do the same.
Any questions to Sheila Porrer (sheila.porrer@virginmedia.com)

OTHER CHRISTIAN AID NEWS:

Christmas Appeal
This year's Christmas Appeal is for flood victims in Ethiopia. Donnay and her husband Gnipey made a living farming their land near the Omo river. After floods, driven by climate change, swept away their home, their land and their livestock, Donnay and her family received help from Christian Aid partner Agri Service Ethiopia (ASE) to rebuild their lives.



Read the full story and much more on the Christian Aid website, or in the recent postal mailing. If you would like to receive postal mailings about Christian Aid's work, and the twice yearly magazine, do contact Christian Aid on hello@christian-aid.org or call the Supporter Care team on 08080 004004 to get your name on the circulation list.
Thank you for your support!

DOWNING PLACE URC SPECIAL CAUSE
NOVEMBER 2026: MAGGIE'S



A cancer diagnosis brings not only physical challenges, but also emotional, practical and spiritual concerns. For many people across the UK, **Maggie's** offers a unique source of support during these difficult times.

Founded in 1996 by Maggie Keswick Jencks, herself a breast cancer patient, the charity was created from her belief that people facing cancer need much more than medical treatment alone. Maggie wanted those affected by cancer to have access to expert advice, emotional support and a welcoming environment where they could simply be themselves.

Today, Maggie's centres are located alongside major NHS cancer hospitals throughout the United Kingdom. Designed by leading architects and surrounded by beautiful gardens, these centres are deliberately different from clinical settings. Visitors can drop in without an appointment, enjoy a cup of tea, talk with trained professionals, or meet others who understand what they are going through.

The support offered by Maggie's is free of charge and extends to family members and friends as well as those with a cancer diagnosis. Services include counselling, stress-management courses, benefits advice, support groups and help with the challenges of living with cancer. The charity also recognises the importance of caring for the whole person, helping people find strength, hope and resilience in uncertain times.

Many who have used Maggie's speak warmly of the kindness and companionship they found there. In an age when loneliness and anxiety can often accompany serious illness, Maggie's provides a place of refuge and understanding.

Maggie's brings a welcome, dignity and hope to thousands of people each year. It is a remarkable charity that continues to make a real difference in the lives of individuals and families affected by cancer.

WAYS OF GIVING TO OUR SPECIAL CAUSE

- Special Collection at worship on Sunday 15th November 2026 (cash, cheque or card)
- Downing Place Church, Cambridge: Wednesday Lunchtime Concerts (cash or card). In particular *From Darkness to Light* November 25th, 1.00-2.00pm. Jane Bower (words, live illustration) and James Williams (piano) - a concert marking Maggie's 30th anniversary.
- Trinity College Chapel: The Cantilena Singers (with 4 DP members!) – a carol concert for Maggie's 4-5.30 pm on Sunday December 6th. Maggie's Cambridge Carol Concert | Maggie's
- Direct to the church bank account (reference SPECIAL CAUSE)
- Via Home - Downing Place URC - the 'Donate' button is on the homepage.
- Select Special Donations as the fund
- Directly via the Maggie's website: Maggie's | Everyone's home of cancer care

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THANKYOU FROM KNIT ONE GIVE ONE



A Big Thankyou to all who donated and supported the Knit One Give One tabletop Sales at the end of August. We raised £120. So £60 for Homestart,Cambridge and £60 for The Sallymay IP School in Sierra Leone.

All items not sold will find a home and the Bric-à-brac items were taken to the Arthur Rank charity shop.

Our next event will be the Christmas Tabletop sales on December 2nd/3rd. Please put these dates in your diary. We thank you for your continued support.
Anne Disney.

The Wellbeing Ceilidh

WELLBEING CEILIDH

with

the Magog Ceilidh Band

Join us for an evening of folk music, dancing, and fun!



Downing Place United Reformed Church, Cambridge

Saturday 14 November 2026

Arrival from	Dancing begins	Finish
6.45pm	approximately 7.10pm	by 9.30pm

This is an alcohol-free event.
Soft drinks and refreshments included in the interval.

Tickets £12.50, scan QR code or email vitaladaptation@gmail.com

Come alone or with a partner, all are welcome, newcomers encouraged!

KNIT ONE GIVE ONE



CHRISTMAS SALE

Knitted items & bric-a-brac

sold in aid of

Arthur Rank Hospice,

Sallymay International Preschool in Sierra Leone & Downing Place URC

2nd and 3rd December, 10.30am - 2.30pm

The Hub, Downing Place URC

THE GIBSON CHRISTMAS LUNCH AT

The Park Restaurant

The **Gibson Lunch** team invite you to enjoy a Christmas Lunch at **Cambridge Regional College's The Park Restaurant** on **Thursday 17th December at 12.30pm**

£20 per person

(original price of £25.50 subsidised to £20)

To book, please contact the **Office at Downing Place URC,** letting them know what your meal choices are (menu on the next page) and how it is best for you to pay; cash or card.

Christmas Lunch Menu

3 Courses £20

Starters

Salmon and White Fish Mousse Parsley and Dill Sauce,
Crispy Capers, Crostini **(GFO)**

Roasted Parsnip Soup, Truffle Oil, Herb Gremolata **(VG) (GFO)**

Porchetta, Celeriac Remoulade, Apple Gel, Crispy Crackling

Mains

Roast Turkey, with Traditional Trimmings, Roasted Potatoes, Gravy **(GFO)**

Braised Beef with Chive Mash, Charred Carrot, Buttered Cabbage, Gravy **(GF)**

Grilled Bream, Pickled Radish, Fennel and Potato Terrine with Bercy Sauce **(GF)**

Salted Gnocchi with Roasted Leek, Onions, Peas, Sage Butter **(GF) (VGO)**

Nut Roast, with Traditional Trimmings, Roasted Potatoes, Gravy **(GFO) (N) (VG)**

Desserts

Orange and Polenta Cake, Apricot Glaze, Chantilly Cream **(GF)**

Christmas Pudding and Custard **(GF)**

Sticky Toffee Pudding, Caramel Sauce **(GF)**

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thepark-cambridge.co.uk

Dietary Requirements
(V) = vegetarian (VG) = vegan (GF) = gluten free
(VO) = vegetarian option (VGO) = vegan option (GFO) = gluten free option (N)= contains nuts

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Please specify the option when ordering

All our food is sourced locally & freshly prepared on-site daily. Please bear with us in busy periods. Please do inform us if you have any allergies or special dietary requirements to enable us to accommodate your needs

All Age
NEW YEAR SOCIAL

Music, food & entertainment

SATURDAY
9TH JANUARY 2027
FROM 5.30-8.30PM

You are all warmly invited to an all-age new year social on Saturday January 9th 2027, from 5.30-8.30pm.

Music, food and entertainment are all in the plan!
You are encouraged to 'dress up' if you wish, and we are are suggesting black and red as a striking colour theme (though we'll let you in if you wear other colours).
Please save the date, book your place (at the office), and contact Jane Bower or any one of the Social Events Team if you can help with the following:

- hall and table decorating
- entertainment 'turns' - songs, instruments, readings, dance, jokes etc etc - children and adults
- catering/serving/clearing up
- AV (mics may be needed for performers)



Thank you and look forward to seeing you there!

Jane Bower, Alan Rickard, Tim Rowland, Stephen Thornton

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Start Date	Name	Time	Location
Sun-1-Nov	Choir Rehearsal	10:00	Main Church
Sun-1-Nov	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion, led by The Reverend Elizabeth Caswell	11:00	Main Church
Mon-2-Nov	Autumn House Group -	19:30	Zoom
Tue-3-Nov	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	14:30	St Athanasios' Church
Tue-3-Nov	Worship, Discipleship & Spirituality Group Meeting	19:30	Zoom
Wed-4-Nov	Lunchtime Concert - Neil Crossland (piano)	13:00	Main Church
Wed-4-Nov	Concrete Rose Care Leavers Hub	15:00	The Hub
Thu-5-Nov	Midweek Worship led by the Reverend John Proctor	11:00	Main
Thu-5-Nov	Knit One Give One	13:30	The Hub
Thu-5-Nov	Autumn House Group	14:00	Rooms 1 & 2
Sun-8-Nov	Remembrance Sunday	-	-
Sun-8-Nov	Choir Rehearsal	10:00	Main Church
Sun-8-Nov	Remembrance Sunday Worship, led by The Reverend Elizabeth Caswell	10:50	Main Church
Mon-9-Nov	Officers' Meeting	10:15	Room 3
Mon-9-Nov	Autumn House Group	19:30	Zoom

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

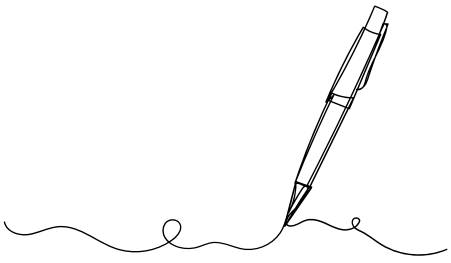
Mon-9-Nov	World Church & Public Issues Group	19:30	Zoom
Tue-10-Nov	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	14:30	St Athanasios' Church
Tue-10-Nov	Finance Group	19:00	Room 3
Wed-11-Nov	Lunchtime Concert - Krassimira Jeliazkova, violin & Pierre Lesaffre (piano)	13:00	Main Church
Wed-11-Nov	Concrete Rose Care Leavers Hub	15:00	The Hub
Thu-12-Nov	Prayer Meeting	10:15	St Columba's Chapel
Thu-12-Nov	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion, led by the Reverend Professor David Thompson	11:00	Main Church
Thu-12-Nov	Knit One Give One	13:30	The Hub
Thu-12-Nov	Autumn House Group - The Lord's Prayer	14:00	Rooms 1 & 2
Sat-14-Nov	Wellbeing Ceilidh	18:45	Main Church
Sun-15-Nov	Choir Rehearsal	10:00	Main Church
Sun-15-Nov	Sunday Worship, led by Members of the Finance Committee	11:00	Main Church
Sun-15-Nov	Retiring Collection for Monthly Cause	12:00	Main Church
Sun-15-Nov	Church Meeting	12:30	Church
Sun-15-Nov	Open Table Service	18:00	The Church

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Mon-16-Nov	Autumn House Group - The Lord's Prayer	19:30	Zoom
Tue-17-Nov	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	14:30	St Athanasios' Church
Wed-18-Nov	Lunchtime Concert - Sofia Berdnik (piano)	13:00	Main Church
Wed-18-Nov	Concrete Rose Care Leavers Hub	15:00	The Hub
Thu-19-Nov	Midweek Worship led by Dr Janet Bottoms	11:00	Main Church
Thu-19-Nov	Gibson Lunch	12:30	Gibson Hall
Thu-19-Nov	Knit One Give One	13:30	The Hub and Church
Thu-19-Nov	Autumn House Group - The Lord's Prayer	14:00	Rooms 1 & 2
Sun-22-Nov	Choir Rehearsal	10:00	Main Church
Sun-22-Nov	Sunday Worship, led by The Reverend Deborah McVey	11:00	Main Church
Sun-22-Nov	Solidarity Hub	please email	solidarityhub@downingplaceurc.org
Tue-24-Nov	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	14:30	St Athanasios' Church
Wed-25-Nov	Lunchtime Concert - Jane Bower (readings and live illustration) & James Williams (piano)	13:00	Church and Emmanuel Room

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Wed-25-Nov	Concrete Rose Care Leavers Hub	15:00	The Hub
Thu-26-Nov	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion, led by the Reverend Elizabeth Caswell	11:00	Main Church
Thu-26-Nov	Knit One Give One	13:30	The Hub and
Thu-26-Nov	Elders' Meeting	19:30	Group Therapy Centre, Macalister Room
Sun-29-Nov	Advent Sunday	-	-
Sun-29-Nov	Choir Rehearsal	10:00	Main Church
Sun-29-Nov	Advent Sunday Worship, led by The Reverend Deborah McVey and Zoe Bennett	11:00	Main Church
Tue-1-Dec	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	14:30	St Athanasios' Church
Wed-2-Dec	Knit One Give One Christmas Table Top Sale	10:30	The Hub
Wed-2-Dec	Lunchtime Concert - Diana Cooper (piano)	13:00	Main Church
Wed-2-Dec	Concrete Rose Care Leavers Hub	15:00	The Hub



MEMBERS PREACHING ELSEWHERE IN NOVEMBER

1 November

Chris Baker, Soham Methodist

Janet Tollington, Saffron Walden URC

David Tatem, Melbourn URC

Simone Maghenzani, Magdalene College Evensong

8 November

None

11 November, 10.45am

Deborah McVey, Remembrance Day at Histon Road Cemetery, the Dissenters Ceremony

15 November

Chris Baker, Stetchworth and Cheveley URC

Penny Flynn, Fulbourn URC

22 November

Chris Baker, St Ives Free Church

David Thompson, St Luke's Church

Janet Tollington, Buntingford URC

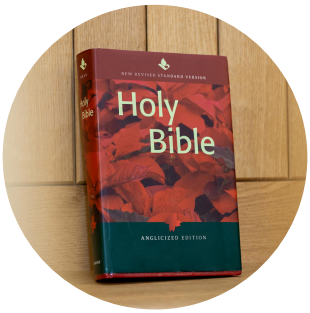
Elizabeth Caswell, Fulbourn URC

29 November

Janet Tollington, Lion Walk URC, Colchester

Elizabeth Caswell, Stetchworth and Cheveley URC Penny Flynn, Buntingford URC

LECTIONARY FOR NOVEMBER



These are the readings suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary, as in ROOTS, the material used by our Children's Ministry team.
They may be altered if that is the preacher's wish.

1 November
IV Sunday before Advent

Micah 3:5-12
Psalm 43
1 Thessalonians 2:9-13
Matthew 23:1-12

8 November
III Sunday before Advent

Joshua 24:1-3a,14-25
Psalm 78:1-7
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

15 November
II Sunday before Advent

Judges 4:1-7
Psalm 123*
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Matthew 25:14-30

22 November
Christ the King
Sunday before Advent

Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

29 November
Advent I

Mark 13:24-37
Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7,17-19 1
Corinthians 1:3-9

6 December
Advent II

Mark 1:1-8
Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2,8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a



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ITEMS FOR MAGAZINE:
Please send items to the Editor and Jess Uden - preferably by email (see above)

WEB EDITOR: Jess Uden jess@downingplaceurc.org

Please send items to be included in the November edition no later than November 20th 2026

DOWNING PLACE URC